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ABSTRACT

Investigated was the influence of an introductory special education course on the attitudes of 86 college students toward the handicapped. The Attitude Toward Handicapped Individuals (ATHI) scale was used as the pre- and post-test measure. For the total sample, there was an increase in ATHI scores, indicating more positive attitudes. (Appended are pre- and post-test raw scores, an instruction sheet, data control sheet, and copy of the ATHI scale.) (SBH)

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PRE AND POST-SEMESTER ATTITUDES TOWARD THE HANDICAPPED OF STUDENTS IN INTRODUCTORY SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects on college level students of an introductory special education course. The specific aspect studied was the influence of that course on the students' attitudes toward the handicapped.

The null hypothesis tested was that, over the period of 1 semester, the attitudes toward the handicapped of students in 3 different sections of the same college level introductory special education course would not be significantly improved at the .05 level.

Antecedents

One of the major objectives of almost any special education course (and most other courses) in college is to present to the student some combination of a predetermined set of facts, concepts, and methods, and to strive to teach these in such a way that they will be helpful to the student in the future. However, there is a second, and perhaps even more important objective: the changing of student attitudes. This is more true in special education, than in some other fields. Attitudes are crucial to the effectiveness of a teacher of the handicapped. The prime difference between the special education teacher and his regular classroom counterpart is the effectiveness of the special teacher in understanding his students'

abilities and disabilities and his effectiveness in emplementing and carrying out a program which will make the most of these two aspects of his students. The special teacher's attitude has a direct relationship to this effectiveness and can be the deciding factor in any evaluation of his ability as a teacher.

All of this makes it extremely important that the prospective special education teacher develop the healthiest attitude possible before he enters his chosen profession. It is assumed that, at the outset of his teacher training, this prospective teacher lacks a high level of attitudinal well-being and that a large portion of his attitude change will come from what he receives in his special education classes. It has been demonstrated that attitudes toward disabled persons become more positive as levels of information about those persons increases (Higgs, 1975). The present study attempted to determine to what degree positive attitude formation, if any, occurs at an early level of information; namely in an introductory special education course. It is felt that at this level of preparatory coursework, good attitude formation is essential in laying the groundwork for later development both in professional training and in the actual work situation.

Definitions of Terms

ATDP scale: Attitude Towards Disabled Persons scale. This a twenty item attitudinal scale on which acceptance, understanding, and perception of difference are measured on a

Likert type six point scale with a score range of 0 to 120.

ATHI scale: Attitude Towards Handicapped Individuals scale. This is basically the same scale as the ATDP, except for modification of the title.

Data Control Sheet: For the purposes of this study, a data control sheet is a questionnaire given to each subject, requesting his social security number, sex, age, class level, and major.

Handicapped: Any person who is below normal in any mental or physical function, to such an extent that he requires special attention in order to develop to his maximum capacity.

CHAPTER I

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter includes a look at some of the more recent reports and studies which have been conducted on attitudes and attitude change. It would be far too assuming to suggest that the present chapter, in any way, exhibits a thorough examination of the related literature; however a genuine attempt has been made to include a sufficient amount of information for the reader to have a well-rounded overview of some of this literature.

One report by Lazar, Orpet, and Demos (1973) indicated some findings which were rather favorable to the position that significant attitude change toward the handicapped can occur within the period of one semester. This study used a graduate class in special education with twenty students (seven males and thirteen females) as its subjects. The class was conducted "with a carefully planned and sequenced instructional program using structured themes and positive reinforcement." Group discussions were held and a strong logical and cognitive approach to arguements and their support was stressed, and the affective approach was avoided. As a result of this type of class structureing, the class as a whole scored significantly higher on post-tests of two attitudinal scales than they had

on pre-tests of the same two scales. The scales used were the PSCS (Preferred Student Characteristic Scale) and the ATDP (Attitude Toward Disabled Persons Scale). (A variation of the ATDP is used in the present study as well.) There was, however, one interesting exception to the above findings. Even though there was a significant increase in the scores of both males and females on the ATDP, the same did not occur for the PSCS. The males scored significantly higher on this test, as on the other test, but the females did not. This seemed to indicate that the females made no significant shift toward greater cognitive perspective as measured by the Preferred Student Characteristic Scale.

In a related study by Skrtic, Sigler, and Lazar (1973) concerning attitude differences of male and female TMR teachers, it was concluded that the sex of these teachers had no effect on their attitudes toward the handicapped student. It was stated that these findings might be attributed to the nature of the training programs the teachers had been through and to "a selectivity phenomena that draws a unique type of person for teaching this particular type of exceptional group."

In yet another related study by Lazar and Ernandes (1974), a different set of findings was made. In this study there was found to be a significant difference in scores of male and female students with females scoring higher. The difference in this study was that the subjects were in an introductory special education course and at a less advanced level

than were the subjects in the two previously reviewed studies. Another difference was that the scale used was the IOI (Is of Identity) which is more of a measure of social adjustment than of attitudes toward any group. It might be noted that the subjects of this study are more closely related to the level of educational advancement of the subjects in the present study than were those in the two previously reviewed reports.

As previously stated in the review of the report by Lazar, Orpet, and Demos (1973), the ATHI used in the present study is a modification of the ATDP. The relationship between these two scales as well as a determination of the reliability of the ATHI were reported by Stodden, Graves, and Lazar (1973). In this paper it was reported that the basic modification made between the two instruments was in the title itself. This modification consisted of the substitution of the term "handicapped" for "disabled", with the rationale that the term "handicapped" has a more general meaning than "disabled". This change came about in reaction to the expressed opinions of many persons who had taken the instrument that the term "disabled" caused it to be too restrictive and referred more to the physically disabled than to the handicapped in general.

Results of the study indicated the relationship between the ATDP and ATHI scales to be significant at the .01 level, indicating that the change in terminology made little or no difference. The reliability of the ATHI was also found to be the same as that of the ATDP. It was stressed, however, that

further research on the ATHI should be carried out in order to further substantiate its validity and reliability. It is felt by this writer that, considering the similarities of the two tests, the validity and reliability of the ATHI will measure close to the same in any trial, but that the slight difference between the tests would make the use of the ATHI somewhat more desirable for the present study.

Another, more specifically teacher oriented attitude scale, the MTAI (Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory), was used in a study by Alper and Retish (1972). In this study a comparison was made of the effects that student teaching has on the attitudes of students in elementary, secondary, and special education. The subjects (ten in each area of education) were given a pre-test of the MTAI and a questionnaire which was constructed specifically for the study. The pre-test was administered three days prior to the beginning of student teaching and a post-test using the same instruments was given approximately eitht weeks later, during the last week of student teaching.

The results of the experiment showed a significant decrease in positive attitude after the student teaching experience for the total groups. The elementary education majors showed the greatest decrease and this change was the only one significant at the .05 level. The results of the other groups were not significant, but can be taken as some small indication of change. The secondary education majors, like those in

elementary education, showed a decrease in positive attitude, but those in special education showed a slight increase in positive attitude as a result of student teaching. This last finding may be considered pertinent to the present study in that student teaching is a part of the total special education teacher training program, just as the introductory course used in the present study is. If there is a relationship between these two levels of teacher training in special education, and this same relationship exists in elementary and secondary education, perhaps these latter two disciplines could learn from some of the methodology used in special education to create positive attitudes.

Another aspect of attitudes toward the handicapped is that of the attitudes of normal peers to school age handicapped individuals. In a study by Gottlieb (1974) concerning the attitudes of Norwegian and American normal children; aged ten to fourteen years, toward mildly retarded children; it was indicated that the American children have a relatively healthy attitude toward the handicapped, and not only this, but the attitudes of the American children was less variable as to the situation in which the handicapped child was perceived.

A much broader stratification of society was sampled in a study by Higgs (1975). In this study, the effects of a high degree of contact with, and information about the physically handicapped was compared with the effects of a low degree of the same. There were thirty subjects in each group studied,

and there were ten groups:

1. Nondisabled - eight grade - high contact
2. Nondisabled - eight grade - minimal contact
3. Nondisabled - twelfth grade - high contact
4. Nondisabled - twelfth grade - minimal contact
5. Nondisabled - college undergraduate
6. Physically disabled - college undergraduate
7. Vocational rehabilitation counsellors - high contact
8. College advisors and counsellors - low contact
9. Parents of at least one child who is physically disabled
10. Parents of nondisabled children

Several instruments were used, including the ATDP. In the results, a general high degree of correlation was indicated between a high degree of contact, high degree of information, and a more positive attitude toward the physically disabled. Further findings indicated that females fit into the above three categories more often than males, and also that the same three categories increased in general with the age of the subject, with the lowest levels of contact, information, and positive attitude occuring among the high school subjects. All of these findings would seem to indicate that a college level special education student would have a high degree of this positive attitude toward the handicapped and the degree of positive attitude would increase progressively through college and afterward. More specifically, it would seem that the degree of positive attitude would increase in an

introductory special education class because of the strong factor of increased information and hopefully some degree of contact.

One process which may be closely related to attitudes is that of labeling, that is, assigning a child to some specific group such as educable mentally retarded (EMR), learning disabled (LD), or others. Attitude may be considered one of the causes of a certain label being assigned to a child. If this is the case, then a positive attitude would be highly desirable in order that a child would not be mislabeled because of some prejudice which the teacher may have.

A study by Smith and Greenberg (1975) dealt with this rather well. In this study, a sample of EMR teachers was taken from over a large geographical area, and each teacher was assigned to a cluster of eight. A different hypothetical but realistic student profile was assigned to each cluster. Each teacher was asked to evaluate both the adaptiveness of the child and the appropriateness of the child's mental retardation label. The children used in the profiles were of varying socio-economic levels and were accordingly indicated in their profiles.

The results of the experiment pointed toward the conclusion that there was a significant correlation between the social class of the child and whether or not he was judged to be retarded by the teacher. The lower the child's socio-economic level, the higher the likelihood that he would be labeled

(or mislabeled) mentally retarded. Mislabeling because of this factor could be a direct cause of the phenomenon of the "six hour retarded child", that is, the child who is considered retarded during the six hours that he is in school, but meets the behavioral expectations of a normal child in his society during the other eighteen hours of the day. Thus this child is considered retarded for the six hours of school and normal for the other eighteen hours.

In another experiment dealing with the labeling of children, by Frerichs and Adelman (1974), a classroom of adolescents was viewed on videotape by two groups of prospective teachers. One group of teachers comprising the experimental group was told that the children whom they were viewing were low achievers, while the control group was told that the children were normal. "On the basis of responses to items on the ATSS (Attitudes Toward Students Scale), the experimental subjects tended to view the slow learners (or at least those who they thought to be slow learners) as less responsible, having less self-control, more prone to rudeness, and showing less capacity to engage in the abstract (formal operations) level of discussion." This finding seems to illustrate that not only do attitudes effect labels, but labels effect attitudes. In other words, an attitude as formed by perceived social standing, can effect the label a teacher places on a child (this indicated by Smith and Greenberg); and conversely, a child's assigned label can effect the attitude of the teacher toward

that child (this indicated by Frerichs and Adelman).

As a side note, it should be pointed out that this same study by Frerichs and Adelman indicated that, as measured by the ATSS, there is a positive relationship between expressed attitudes and grade point average: the higher the grade point average of a subject, in general the more negative his attitude will be. The present study in no way deals with this, but further study on the subject of this correlation might prove interesting.

In his descriptive article of the applied teacher training approach in special education at Appalacian State University, Brooks (1975) listed a set of objectives for the program. One of these objectives was "to develop an awareness of one's attitudes, prejudices, feelings, and responses as they influence, and are influenced by exceptional children." It is the opinion of this writer that this statement is a good summation of what the attitudinal objectives should be for any good college level special education course.

CHAPTER II

SUBJECTS AND PROCEDURES

The subjects in this study consisted of the enrollment in three sections of the same introductory special education course at Eastern Kentucky University, in the spring of 1976. The course number and title were Introduction to the Education Of Exceptional Children, SED 345, and it dealt with educational provisions, problems, and characteristics of exceptional children in the following categories:

1. mental retardation
2. giftedness
3. social or emotional problems
4. speech, vision, and hearing defects
5. crippling and special health problems
6. learning disabilities

The total number of subjects at the end of the semester was 86. Eighty of this number were females and the other six were males. Most of the subjects were 19 to 20 years of age but others were as young as 18 years and as old as 47 years. The sample included 14 freshmen, 34 sophomores, 33 juniors, 4 seniors, and 1 graduate student. Majors varied widely but most were closely related to special education and to exceptional children.

For the purposes of this study each class section will be given a letter designation. Section A had 31 subjects,

B had 23 subjects, and section C had 32 subjects. These designations were picked at random and make no reference to designations assigned by Eastern Kentucky University.

Procedures

The groups were administered a pre-test and post-test of the Attitude Toward Handicapped Individuals (ATHI) scale. Pre-tests were given on Thursday and Friday, January 8 and 9, 1976, and then again (for the benefit of those who had been absent from the 1st class meeting) on Monday and Tuesday, January 12 and 13, 1976. All testing occurred during the regularly scheduled class periods. Class A was scheduled at 9:15 to 10:15 AM on Mondays, Wednesdays, and alternate Fridays. Class B was scheduled at 8:00 to 9:00 AM on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and alternate Fridays, and class C was scheduled at 9.15 to 10:15 AM on the same days as class B.

The same testing schedule was followed for the post-tests, except that only one administration was required for class B because of good attendance at that one meeting. Administrations took place between April 20 and 24, 1976.

Several members of the total class enrollment in each class had to be deleted from the final sample. Reasons for their deletion varied, but most were for one of 3 reasons:

1. dropped the course
2. missed either pre or post-test
3. deleted items from an instrument

The amount of time required to complete the instrument ranged from 5 minutes to 11 minutes with an average of 7 3/4 min.

These figures are based on pre-test times, but are nearly the same for the post-test. No time limit was imposed on the Ss, but they were encouraged to complete their papers as quickly as possible.

Instructions were included for the subjects with each instrument and no dialogue occurred other than to introduce the scale and tell the students what it was being used in conjunction with. The subjects were told that they were being asked to complete the scale for experimental purposes and that no grades would be given and no names divulged.

The 1st page of the hand-out given to the students was the instructions, the 2nd was a data control sheet and the 3rd and 4th were the scale itself. The data control sheet was a simple form requesting information as to the students'' classification, major, age, and sex. All of this information was satisfactorily completed in every case. A copy of the data control sheet, along with the instructions and ATHI scale can be found in the appendices of this report.

After the instruments had been handed out and the subjects had read the instructions thoroughly, they were asked if they had any questions before beginning. The students then proceeded to complete the data control sheet and ATHI scale. They were asked to hold their papers until all subjects were finished and all could be returned simultaneously. The same procedure was followed for each session. The only difference in the sessions was that this experimenter was present at the first

administrations and not at the others. Class instructors for the respective classes carried out the other administrations as per the experimenter's directions. No problems or occurrances which might effect results, were reported by the instructors.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS

The null hypothesis tested was that, over the period of one semester, the attitudes toward the handicapped of students in 3 different sections of the same college level introductory special education course would not be significantly improved at the .05 level. As can be observed in Table I, there was a significant difference between pre and post-test scores at the .05 level. (A t of 2.0 is necessary to be significant at the .05 level in the total sample.)

TABLE I

PRE-POST ANALYSIS OF TOTAL SAMPLE

Tests	N of Ss	$\bar{X}$ Scores	$\bar{X}$ Gain	S D	t
Pre	86	79.3139	5.7442	14.122	3.57*
Post		85.0581		14.067	

*Significant at .001

The mean scores increased from 79.3139 on the pre-test to 85.0581 on the post-test and a mean gain of 5.7442 was computed, indicating an attitude improvement. The difference in standard deviations seems to indicate that there was little difference in the variability of scores between the individuals in the

total sample from pre-test to post-test. A significance of .001 was calculated, thus the increase in means was well within the .05 level of significance.

An analysis of the 3 individual classes included in this study reveals that only 1 of the classes failed to produce a significant difference. The other 2 classes did, however, produce a significant difference as can be observed in Tables II, III, and IV.

TABLE II

PRE-POST ANALYSIS OF CLASS SECTION A

Tests	N of Ss	$\bar{X}$ Scores	$\bar{X}$ Gain	S D	t
Pre	31	81.0968	5.8064	12.472	2.23*
Post		86.9032		12.718	

*Significant at .034

As seen in Table II, the students in section A did make a significant gain in scores (at the .05 level) from 81.0968 to 86.9032. A t score of 2.04 is the least that is significant at the .05 level for the 31 subjects involved, so the section A t score of 2.23 was within the significant range. The mean gain was 5.8064 and standard deviations were 12.472 for the pre and 12.718 for the post-test.

TABLE III

PRE-POST ANALYSIS OF CLASS SECTION B

Tests	N of Ss	$\bar{X}$ Scores	$\bar{X}$ Gain	S D	t
Pre	23	74.0869	11.0870	14.933	3.28*
Post		85.1739		12.430	

*Significant at .003

Table III indicates that section B produced the greatest significance. A t score of 2.07 is the cut off for significance at .05 with a group of 23, and the t score for this group was 3.28. Section B was well within the significant range. The mean scores were 74.0869 pre, and 85.1739 post, for a mean gain of 11.0870. Standard deviation for the pre-test was 14.933 and 12.430 for the post-test

TABLE IV

PRE-POST ANALYSIS OF CLASS SECTION C

Tests	N of Ss	$\bar{X}$ Scores	$\bar{X}$ Gain	S D	t
Pre	32	81.3438	1.8438	14.502	0.77
Post		83.1875		16.411	

Section C was the only class which failed to produce a significant difference. The neccessary t score for this group of 32 to have produced a significant difference at .05 is 2.04. Since the t of 0.77 calculated, did not fall within this range, no significance can be reported. The pre-test mean score was 81.3438 and the post-test mean score was 83.1875. This was a mean gain of 1.8438. Standard deviation for the pre-test was 14.502 and 16.411 for the post-test.

In summary, the difference between pre-test and post-test scores was significant at the .05 level for the total sample and for 2 of the 3 individual sections. The differences in scores, in all cases were found to be in the form of an increase, indicating more positive attitudes. The null hypothesis was, therefore rejected for the total sample and for 2 of the 3 individual sections.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects on college level students of an introductory special education course. The specific aspect studied was the influence of that course on the students' attitudes toward the handicapped.

According to the review of literature, there has been some degree of attitudinal improvement within the period of a semester in a special education class, at least at the graduate level, and during student teaching. However, in a study using TMR teachers as subjects, no significant change was observed. In another study, the reliability of the ATHI was found to be equally as good as that of the ATDP. It was on the basis of this that the ATHI was found to be a suitable instrument for the present study. There was found, in another study, to be a high correlation between positive attitudes toward the handicapped and the degree of contact and information about them.

The subjects used in the present study were 86 students in 3 sections of the same introductory special education course. These subjects were administered the ATHI scale at the beginning and end of a semester, to determine if any

attitude change occurred as a result of that course. There was found to be a significant increase in positive attitudes toward the handicapped. This increase was exhibited by the total group and by 2 of the 3 classes individually.

It can be concluded from these findings that, assuming the class tested was representative of introductory special education classes, this type of course has desirable effects on the attitudes of the students in it. These effects occurred in this study, even without any treatment and solely as a result of the normal process of instruction in the classes studied.

The present study is limited in several respects. First, the findings are based only on what has occurred in a course at one university. Because of this, it would be difficult to generalize the findings to the larger population of special education students in introductory classes. Another limitation is that only one attitudinal scale was used. In other studies in which several scales were used, somewhat variant results were obtained from different scales. Had more scales been used in the present study, perhaps more variant results would have occurred also. Still another limitation can be seen in the factor of the Hawthorne effect. There is the possibility that the subjects made a special effort to score higher on the post-test because they felt that they would be expected to. If some method could be devised to test the subjects without their knowing they were being tested, this effect could be eliminated.

Because of the above limitations and because of the fact that more diverse types of data could be obtained, it would be desirable to have further research in this same area. The importance of teacher attitudes is evident and any research to measure the development of more positive attitudes would be welcome.

APPENDIX A

PRE AND POST TEST RAW SCORES ON ATHI SCALE

OF STUDENTS IN INTRODUCTORY SPECIAL EDUCATION SECTIONS A, B, & C

Section A Raw Scores

Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
56	98	81	95	84	103	93	89
87	96	88	93	86	101	83	73
55	59	92	103	90	97	74	63
89	85	83	89	90	98	81	87
113	85	67	92	79	91	62	69
95	55	77	83	68	79	77	86
90	94	68	75	74	80	92	99
67	84	82	98	91	95		

Section B Raw Scores

Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
76	88	48	94	76	89	94	97
96	98	80	82	84	95	79	90
79	89	82	62	51	62	71	66
32	83	70	61	67	97	82	92
79	101	63	79	73	83	85	87
80	74	91	98	66	92		

Section C Raw Scores

Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
99	64	44	71	71	85	65	78
116	111	81	75	59	36	62	70
90	97	89	86	92	91	68	80
87	97	78	77	85	91	59	63
90	99	78	107	91	91	91	86
91	92	95	104	78	96	72	55
104	98	89	84	82	67	81	93
89	97	76	60	77	86	74	79

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONS, DATA CONTROL SHEET, AND ATHI SCALE

INSTRUCTIONS

The attached ATHI Scale is a short list of questions concerning handicapped persons. It would be greatly appreciated if you would complete this form along with the Data Control Sheet. The information from these forms will be used in a research study for a graduate student in special education. None of the information will be used to help determine your grade in this or any other class or to evaluate you as an individual in any way. All students in all the SED 345 classes will complete this scale, and all this information will be compiled into one large group and coded so that all individual identities will be lost.

There is no time limit on completing these forms, but please try not to take an excessive amount of time in filling them out. It is very important that you answer all the questions. Please start by completing the Data Control Sheet first and then the ATHI Scale.

Greg Drake

DATA CONTROL SHEET
(please answer every question)

I understand fully that information received from this scale will be used for research purposes only and that no personal reference will be made to me in the final research paper. This scale will, in no way affect my grade for this or any other class nor will it be used to evaluate me as an individual. Your SED 345 instructor will not be given access to this scale.

Social Security Number _____

Sex (circle one): M F

Age: _____

Class level: (circle one)
Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior
Graduate

Major: (circle one)
Elementary Education (Special Ed. endorsement)
Elementary Education (No Special Ed. endorsement)
Secondary Education
Other (indicate) _____

ATHI SCALE

by

Al Lazar

Mark each statement in the left margin according to how much you agree or disagree with it. Please mark every one. Write +1, +2, +3; or -1, -2, -3; depending on how you feel in each case.

+ 3: I AGREE VERY MUCH	- 1: I DISAGREE A LITTLE
+ 2: I AGREE PRETTY MUCH	- 2: I DISAGREE PRETTY MUCH
+ 1: I AGREE VERY LITTLE	- 3: I DISAGREE VERY MUCH

____ 1. Parents of handicapped children should be less strict than other parents.

____ 2. Handicapped persons are just as intelligent as non-handicapped ones.

____ 3. Handicapped people are usually easier to get along with than other people.

____ 4. Most handicapped people feel sorry for themselves.

____ 5. Handicapped people are the same as anyone else.

____ 6. There shouldn't be special schools for handicapped children.

____ 7. It would be best for handicapped persons to live and work in special communities.

____ 8. It is up to the government to take care of handicapped persons.

____ 9. Most handicapped people worry a great deal.

____10. Handicapped people should not be expected to meet the same standards as non-handicapped.

____11. Handicapped people are as happy as non-handicapped ones.

____12. Severely handicapped people are no harder to get along with than those with minor handicaps.

____13. It is almost impossible for a handicapped person to lead a normal life.

____14. You should not expect too much from handicapped people.

____15. Handicapped people tend to keep to themselves much of the time.

____16. Handicapped people are more easily upset than non-handicapped people.

____17. Handicapped persons cannot have a normal social life.

_____18. Most handicapped people feel that they are not as good as other people.

_____19. You have to be careful of what you say when you are with handicapped people.

_____20. Handicapped people are often grouchy.

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